

ABSTRACT

THESIS: Homemade Magic: Concealed Deposits in Architectural Contexts in the Eastern United States

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The tradition of placing objects and symbols within, under, on, and around buildings for supernatural protection and good luck, as an act of formal or informal consecration, or as an element of other magico-religious or mundane ritual, has been documented throughout the world. This thesis examines the material culture of magic and folk ritual in the eastern United States, focusing on objects deliberately concealed within and around standing structures. While a wide range of objects and symbols are considered, in-depth analysis focuses on three artifact types: witch bottles, concealed footwear, and concealed cats. This thesis examines the European origins of ritual concealments, their transmission to North America, and their continuation into the modern era. It also explores how culturally derived cognitive frameworks, including cosmology, religion, ideology, and worldview, as well as the concepts of family and household, may have influenced or encouraged the use of ritual concealments among certain groups.